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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the reduction in force (RIF) that took place in the Bridgeton Public Schools, New Jersey, as a result of its exclusion from the formation of a new regional school district. During the school year 1976-77, enrollment declined by 1,600 pupils, tuition diminished by $2,000,000, and staff had to be reduced by 89 employees. The RIF procedure involved reevaluating and reducing program and class sizes and then beginning the task of deleting positions. Some of the steps taken, which are offered as suggestions to school districts, included meeting with the teachers' organization to enlist their support, formulating a seniority list, and keeping staff, students, and community informed of developments. The paper concludes that understanding and managing the results of declining enrollments can make the difference between survival and death of a school system and ultimately a community. Also, the process of dismissing individuals should be conducted in a humanitarian way. Included at the end are steps to follow in an RIF; a sample policy; observations on personnel, programs, facilities, and budgets; and a bibliography of references used. (Author/LD)

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REDUCTION IN FORCE

BRIDGETON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OPTIONS, OPPORTUNITIES AND FISCAL IMPACTS OF DECLINING ENROLLMENT

FRANK MASTORAKI

August 15, 1978

Although the statutes, codes and decisions used as precedents limit the options in dealing with the necessity to reduce staff because of declining enrollments, opportunities are present with reference to procedures and to the impact of declining enrollments.

It is essential to conduct the process of dismissing individuals in the most humanitarian way. Having established a relationship with your staff where honest communication becomes possible, you can at least operate within a framework of mutual trust.

Enlisting the Board members, the leadership of the teachers' organization, parents and community leaders in redirecting or modifying the schools because of declining enrollments, promotes and strengthens the philosophy that these are after all, our schools, attended by our children. These are our problems to which we must apply our solutions. For the teachers who are to remain after the riffing process, for the administrators and supervisors who are to remain after the riffing process, there are opportunities for an in depth look at programs and opportunities for the development of new programs and procedures that may be somewhat different than they were in the past.

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Frank Mastoraki

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 011 850

Although we endured an abrupt, serious decline in the City of Bridgeton because seven sending districts regionalized, I expect that in three years we will be a better system, offering better services under better conditions, particularly in the high school, than we were able to do before the formation of the Cumberland Regional School District.

There are tidy, succinct studies which neatly divide the impact of declining enrollment into categories. In the actual process, it is difficult to separate one from the other. For example, when it became apparent that we would lose about 1600 students Grades 9 to 12 in one year to the regional school, we examined our programs closely, decided which would be dropped, which expanded and what new courses would be offered. We (I included in our discussions Board members, administrators, teachers, parents and students.) decided the class size we would like to establish as an average. We started at 25 and dropped this number to about 18. Having established our program and class size, we then proceeded with the difficult task of deleting positions.

Based upon our decisions concerning the curriculum we intended to implement and the anticipated loss of students, I forecast a loss of about 90 individuals. Actually, the number of Bridgeton Public School employees was reduced by 89. Seventy-four were teachers.

Two years ago there were 367 teachers in the Bridgeton School System. Last year there were 297, four of which were recently added to our staff. Seventy-four teachers were not rehired. Stated more precisely, 74 teaching positions (including two guidance and two nurses) were deleted. Additional position deletions included one specialist, one supervisor, two secretaries, two custodians and seven aides. Two administrative positions and a media

specialist were reduced from twelve months to ten months. Represented in terms of money, the reduction amounted to approximately $1,106,413.00 including fringe benefits. The total number of reductions may be the largest in the State of New Jersey.

The dismissal of an individual for causes over which he has little control and no responsibility is a traumatic experience. A superintendent cannot fill an empty paycheck envelope with compassion and expect it to pay for the groceries.

We presently have two challenges from two teachers and they are challenges to advisory opinions received from Joe Zach who issued about forty advisory opinions last year. We expect resolutions to these challenges sometime in November.

The formation of the Cumberland Regional School District without the inclusion of Bridgeton compounded the difficulty. The withdrawal of approximately 1600 pupils from seven sending districts, the anticipated loss of over $2,000,000.00 in tuition monies and the portend of racial imbalance added to the seriousness of the situation. The New Jersey Department of Education was apprised of this matter as early as October 21, 1974. It was my responsibility to ameliorate the grave conditions to the best of my ability. The tone of the procedure and subsequent events is revealed somewhat in my June 9, 1976 communication to the staff, parents and students (Newsletter, Vol. 3, No. 7, June 9, 1976, page 2). I stated in the Newsletter, "The impact of the Regional High School on our staff will be extremely serious. Since my meeting with the BEA President several months ago, I have been assembling information that I will make available to him and directly to the teachers which will indicate approximately how much staff we will lose as a result of the opening of the new school.

I have reviewed this matter with our Board of Education and the Superintendent of the Cumberland Regional School System. Preliminary estimates place the number of staff members that we will be losing at approximately ninety. This figure is based upon maintaining the average class size at twenty-five students. The Bridgeton Board of Education Policy Committee will begin working on a reduction force policy immediately. Staff members will be invited to participate. There are regulations that govern reduction in force. In order to effect a fair procedure, we checked your files provided you the information for a double check and we are now in the process of listing staff members in terms of unbroken service and certification."

Immediately following the disheartening news that the regional board would open school in September 1977, with all four classes (letter August 3, 1976), I wrote to the Commissioner explaining the dire consequences and seeking aid (letter August 4, 1976). A second letter was sent on August 17, seeking assistance, enclosing our proposed Reduction in Force Policy, underscoring budgetary difficulties and the racial implications. By letter of September 7, 1976, Joseph F. Zach acknowledged the August 17 letter, referred to NJSA 18A 28-9, 10, 11, 12 and responded to the proposed policy. It became clear, and rightfully so, that the resolution of most of the problems rested with us.

The Newsletter of September 22, informed the staff that seniority lists had been prepared to share with them and also detailed events, including communications with the Department of Education, related to the impending reduction in force. Review of educational programs were taking place. Teachers, administrators and Board members were involved. Although the teachers' organization made known by letter of September 30,

1976 its right to negotiate the impact, it was willing to postpone negotiations in order not to delay the serving of notice. The desire of most of the teachers was to know as promptly as possible. Policy #4114, Reduction in Force, was revised October 5 and with the cooperation of the teachers and administrators a comprehensive RIF packet was prepared for the Board for distribution on October 19. A preliminary list of position deletions (70 professional, 3 office personnel) was assembled by representatives of the teachers and administrators on October 29 and reviewed by the Board. Through a memo all teachers were notified that the Board would initiate action to reduce the number of positions at its November 9 public meeting and that staff members whose employment status would be affected immediately would receive notices. The absence of a comma between affected and immediately was a source of some consternation. On the same day with the use of a memory-type IBM typewriter, we produced the appropriate number of letters which contained the reason for position deletion and an opportunity for public review (Solicitor's recommendation). Eighteen respondents requested public review; only four appeared. The Newsletter of November 8, 1976, explained RIF procedures, nature of letters and thanked administrators and teachers by name who were participating in this difficult task of reviewing positions. Total number of deletions acted upon by the Board on November 9 were 79. Seventy-seven copies of a letter in which administrators and teachers had input were sent on November 10, 1976.

During the month of December student registration for courses in 1977-1978 was initiated. Exact numbers for subjects had an impact on RIF. Requests for transfers were received from the teachers, all requests were acknowledged (23), a letter to the teachers' organization president informed

him again that the RIF policy had been adopted on November 9, and that negotiations on impact would begin after January 1, 1977, as per our conversation. Also in December permission was granted for representatives of the teachers' organization to meet with the Commissioner and Dr. Fred Hipp to enlist their help in finding jobs for teachers not hired.

On January 4, 1977, Dr. Fred G. Burke was sent a RIF list for distribution through the County Superintendents. As of February 10, fourteen teachers on the RIF list had been hired by the Cumberland Regional District.

Early in February 1977 a Newsletter was sent to all teachers, informing them we had received our State aid figures and budget cap for the school year 1977-1978. They were told that two budgets were developed reflecting this fiscal information. The first budget would enable us to continue our present programs with a minimum of position deletions and meet the T & E requirements. The second or cap budget would necessitate pronounced cuts in programs and positions. Meetings with the Commissioner revealed that there were no guidelines to follow in the event of a large, immediate decrease in student population and the loss of approximately $2,200,000.00 tuition money. Consequently, in our meeting which included Assemblyman Joseph Chinnici we decided to request aid through legislation. Mr. Chinnici introduced Bill A-3135 which was unanimously approved on February 17, 1977 and subsequently adopted by the Senate and signed by the Governor on April 21, 1977. Consequently, our State aid was increased by $416,000.00 the money coming from the Department of Education.

The first meeting with the teachers' organization to negotiate impact was held on March 2, 1977, at which time demands were made and subsequently refined at our March 14 meeting.

The teachers' organization and the Board on April 5 agreed to the following:

1. Recall lists will be maintained for the duration of the Board-BEA contract which expires in June 1979. Non-tenured personnel will not be included in RIF or recall list. An unanswered letter will be construed as a rejection and the name stricken from the list.
2. RIF'd personnel will be placed on preferred substitute list, following individual's commitment to substitute. Pay will be same as other substitutes.

Also in early March, the Assistant Commissioner indicated probable approval of the cap waiver. Although we were not interested in requesting a cap waiver, we were instructed to follow this procedure in the absence of guidelines for an abrupt decline in student enrollment which would influence revenue. The cap waiver and enactment of Bill A-3135 were pursued simultaneously. Failure in both would mean deletion of an additional 59 positions. The amount we sought in waivers was $350,065.00. We received $253,434.00.

At this time I wish to digress a minute and refer you to a workshop sponsored by the State Department of Education's Division of Research, Planning and Evaluation that took place on June 29, 1978.

Members of this Division and the twenty-five participants stressed the importance of long-range planning in anticipation of and because of declining enrollments. The Division is presently engaged in developing guidelines for this kind of planning. I have included in the material which I will distribute to you the titles of some of the draft studies prepared by the Division.

The participants in this important meeting agreed that declining enrollments pose serious personnel issues, require reexamination of programs, necessitate budgetary changes, call for facility conversions, have economic, social and political implications for the community or communities involved and impact often dramatically on the students, parents and other individuals who may not be associated directly or indirectly with the schools.

How well the results of declining enrollments are understood and managed will make the difference between survival and death of some school systems, and of course, total communities. I must quickly add that plotting declining enrollments and understanding declining enrollments, including causes, in no way implies that you will be able to manage or provide for an orderly decline. In many instances you will find yourself reacting to the situation and in some falling victim to it.

However, you may seize upon an impending disaster as an opportunity for creative leadership. Some of our fellow superintendents have done just that. I refer you particularly to the brilliant work done by Walter L. Marks with the Magnet Schools in Montclair Public School District where an entire declining community was revitalized by changes made in the schools in response to declining enrollments.

My own experience dealt primarily with the humane aspects of an abrupt decline in enrollment. I would like to continue with the Bridgeton experience.

Although we understood the fiscal impact of a declining enrollment, particularly an abrupt one, the general public and City Council did not. Apparently we failed in making the implications clear to the citizens. They expected a reduction in costs commensurate with the reduction in pupils.

Our expenditures remained high, our budget was not appreciably reduced because of:

1. Rising fixed costs.

2. Rising costs for supplies, equipment and services.

3. Rising salaries. The staff received a 6.2% increase. Because the teachers who remained were older teachers, they were and are more expensive teachers.

In addition, we anticipated a loss in the future of over $2 million in tuition monies.

On March 29 the budget was defeated. City Council meeting with the Board of Education reduced the budget by $100,000.00, recommending cuts to be made in supervisory personnel. On April 26, the Board reduced two administrative positions from twelve to ten months, one specialist position from twelve to ten months and deleted specialist and guidance director positions.

On May 2, 1977, BEA representatives met with the Senate Education Committee in an initial effort to win the Committee's approval of S-1814 which when two districts are created from one, resulting in position deletions, will obligate the new district to hire all of the teachers whose positions were deleted.

It was necessary for a variety of reasons to send more letters than the actual number of positions deleted. Throughout the year teachers were hired to replace those who had resigned, fiscal uncertainties forced us to add to our list of deletions and the registration figures also modified our estimate of the number of position deletions.

Conclusion:

We anticipate that it will take three years to arrive at some semblance of stability for our schools. The open communication with all concerned in this distasteful and delicate task was helpful. The dedication of caring secretaries was a significant asset. All communication, pledges of commitment

and avowals of understanding must be followed by honest performance.

It is not enough to comfort yourself with the knowledge that you performed honestly. The person who is losing his job must understand that and you must be prepared to accept the fact that you probably will be the object of his frustration whatever form that may take.

This year the citizens approved the budget for the current year and replaced the Mayor and City Council. The President of City Council served as a member of our Board of Education during the riffing process. The professional staff, including teachers and administrators received increases amounting to 7.6%. The smaller student body functioned better. We had fewer discipline problems following the reduction in force, and the test scores were encouraging.

I have prepared for distribution three items:

First, Suggested Steps to Follow in a Reduction in Force;

Second, our Reduction in Force Policy which is brief and to the point;

Third, a List of Observations on Personnel, Programs, Facilities and Budgets when there is a Decline in Enrollment.

REDUCTION IN FORCE

BRIDGETON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SUGGESTED STEPS TO FOLLOW IN A REDUCTION IN FORCE:

First, read NJSA 18A:28-9 et seq., N.J.A.C. 6:3-1.10 and as many decisions, publications on subject as possible before, during and after RIF process.

Second, explain to the members of the Board of Education the procedures that will be followed.

Third, meet with the leadership of the teachers organization and outline the procedures that will be followed.

Fourth, keep the entire staff, PTA, students and community informed about the procedures that will be followed.

Fifth, gather information about the staff, including years of service, certification and any who may be on leave of absence.

Sixth, formulate seniority lists.

Seventh, enlist teachers and administrators to work with you throughout the entire process.

Eighth, post and review the lists, correct and resubmit lists to all school personnel who will be affected by the riffing process.

Ninth, evaluate your educational program prior to making cuts.

Tenth, notify individuals in writing of Board's intention to delete positions offering opportunity for public review if desired.

Eleventh, delete positions and inform individuals in writing prior to April 30 that they will not be rehired for the coming year.

Twelfth, pray for those who will be dismissed and for yourself.

Frank Mastoraki
Superintendent

June 29, 1978

BRIDGETON PUBLIC SCHOOLS 4114

REDUCTION IN FORCE

Whenever the Board of Education, because of economy, discontinuance of a course offering, or reduction in students, finds it necessary to release an employee 18A:28-9 et seq. and regulations listed below shall be followed:

1. Sixty days notice of intention not to renew the contract shall be issued by the Board of Education.

2. Should there be a situation where a choice is to be made between two equally qualified individuals, the Board of Education will give consideration to Title VI and Title IX dealing with nondiscrimination.

OBSERVATIONS ON PERSONNEL, PROGRAMS, FACILITIES AND BUDGETS WHEN THERE IS A DECLINE IN ENROLLMENT

A. Personnel

1. Include the teachers, administrators, board members and interested citizens in the planning and process.

2. Never neglect humantarian considerations.

3. Follow the statutes.

B. Programs

1. Enlist teachers, administrators, board members, interested citizens, parents and students in program decisions.

2. Take advantage of the decline to delete programs, modify programs, create new programs.

C. Facilities

1. Seek advice of community leaders in the use of former school facilities

2. Never abandon or board up a facility.

D. Budgets

1. Budget up to cap.

2. Accrue free balance.

3. Do not budget for decline.

DECLINING ENROLLMENTS

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

1. Studies

   a. Local Policies for Reduction in Force, Educational Research Service, April 1975.

   b. Reduction in Force, Negotiation News and School Law Reporter, New Jersey School Boards Association, February 1976

   c. R.I.F., N.J.A.S.A. Administrative Guide, March 1976.

2. Office of Economic and Fiscal Planning, Division of Research, Planning and Evaluation, New Jersey State Department of Education Papers

   a. Cozzens, William A., Patterns of Enrollment Fluctuation and Decline in New Jersey School Districts 1966-1967 to 1976-1977, June 22, 1978.

   b. Walling, Peter J., Weber, Robert E., An Overview of Declining Enrollments in New Jersey, June 1978.

   c. Johnson, Frank W., Options For Utilization of School Facilities in Districts With Declining Enrollments, June 21, 1978.

   d. Hirschman, Ira, Enrollment Decline: State Policy Options and Fiscal Impacts, June 23, 1978.

3. Participants in a workshop on declining enrollment on June 29, 1978. Each represented some involvement with aspects of declining enrollment.

   a. Dr. Robert F. Savitt, Superintendent
   Plainview-Old Bethpage Central School District
   Plainview, New York 11803

   b. Dr. Walter L. Marks, Superintendent
   Montclair Public School District
   22 Valley Road
   Montclair, New Jersey 07042

   c. Dr. Fredric Buonocore, Superintendent
   Woodbridge Twp. Public Schools
   Administration Building
   P.O. Box 428
   School Street
   Woodbridge, New Jersey 07075

   d. Dr. William E. Kogen, Superintendent
   Mountain Lakes Public Schools
   400 Boulevard
   Mountain Lakes, New Jersey 07046

e. Dr. Herbert Weintraub, Assistant Superintendent
Pompton Lakes Public School
Van Avenue
Pompton Lakes, New Jersey 07442

f. Mr. Austin Lepine, Assistant Superintendent
Highland Park Public Schools
106 North Fifth Avenue
Highland Park, New Jersey 08904

g. Mr. Elmer F. Corda, Board Secretary
Willingboro Twp. Public Schools
Garden Plaza Building
Willingboro, New Jersey 08046

h. Mr. Frank Sinatra, Superintendent
Perth Amboy Public Schools
178 Barracks Street
Perth Amboy, New Jersey 08861

i. Dr. Melvin Klein, Superintendent
Mrs. Toby Simon, Board Member
Livingston Public Schools
11 Foxcroft Drive
Livingston, New Jersey 07039

j. Mrs. Lillian McNeil
Education Task Force
59 Scotland Road
South Orange, New Jersey 07079

k. Mr. Frank Mastoraki, Superintendent
Bridgeton Public Schools
P. O. Box 500
Bridgeton, New Jersey 08302

New Jersey Association of School Administrators
407 W. State Street, Trenton, New Jersey 08618

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August 16, 1978

Mrs. Helen Burger
Board President
Bridgeton School District
Bank Street
Bridgeton, New Jersey 08302

Dear Mrs. Burger:

Just a note to express my sincere appreciation to your Board for your support of Frank Mastoraki in his endeavors to share his expertise with his colleagues in this state on the problems of riffing and declining enrollments.

Frank's presentation at the NJASA Seminar, "Reduction in Force and Declining Enrollments," held August 15, 1978, in East Brunswick, was overwhelmingly well received by the workshop participants. The overall evaluations were excellent and Frank's portion was particularly highly praised.

Again, on behalf of the Association, our compliments and our thanks.

Sincerely,

Harriett Weisenfeld

Harriett S. Weisenfeld
In-Service Director

cc:
Mr. Frank Mastoraki

HSW:jes